

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE **A2**

NEW YORK TIMES
31 December 1985

6,032 War Dead in '85, Nicaragua Announces

By **STEPHEN KINZER**

Special to The New York Times

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Dec. 30 — Nicaragua's Defense Minister said today that rebel forces had killed 1,143 Government soldiers during 1985 while suffering 4,806 dead.

It was the first time the Government had given casualty figures for the army.

The Defense Minister, Humberto Ortega Saavedra, also said 281 civilians were killed by insurgents in 1985. Diplomats have estimated that more than 15,000 Nicaraguans have died as a result of military action in the last five years.

Mr. Ortega asserted that the Government was approaching "strategic defeat of the mercenary forces." But at the same time, he said he expected that rebel defeats would lead to more direct United States involvement in Nicaragua in 1986.

gua in 1986.

"In the face of its failure to build a strong mercenary force to carry out its strategic plans," he said, "the United States has in recent weeks been turning to increasingly interventionist alternatives."

Mr. Ortega's assertions were challenged today by the principal rebel leader, Adolfo Calero Portocarrero of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force. Mr. Calero said the Sandinistas had lost 5,677 men in combat during 1985. He said his forces were inflicting several times more casualties than they were suffering themselves, but did not give a figure for rebel casualties.

"If we get defensive lethal aid from the United States, then we will be able to liberate Nicaragua next year," Mr. Calero said. "We have declared 1986 as the year of liberation for Nicaragua."

The rebels are hoping that the United

States Congress will approve continued aid to their cause and will drop existing restrictions that limit the aid to non-lethal equipment.

Mr. Ortega conceded that rebels had achieved some successes in 1985, particularly in the front they have opened in the central provinces of Boaco and Chotales. But he said they had paid "a high cost" for maintaining a presence in that area.

Mr. Ortega said, however, that as the rebels lose ground, Nicaragua was facing "a military escalation" by the United States "that could quickly become direct military intervention."

Mr. Ortega said "pirate aircraft" not bearing insignia of any nation had violated Nicaraguan airspace 571 times during 1985. He also said a United States Air Force Awacs intelligence-gathering plane had violated Nicaraguan airspace on Dec. 5.